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CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS: SUMMER 1993

(Advance Report)

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The Food Stamp Program is the nation's largest food assistance program. In summer 1993, the Food Stamp Program served an average of 27.3 million people per month. During that summer, a food stamp household received an average of \$170 in benefits per month. Over \$22 billion were paid out in food stamps that year. The number of food stamp participants grew from 18.6 million persons in July 1989 to a record high of nearly 28.0 million in March 1994, and fell to 27.5 million in May 1994.

Food stamps are made available to virtually all low-income households with few resources to supplement their food purchases and help them maintain a healthy diet. In summer 1993, food stamps represented approximately one-fourth of a household's total monthly income including food stamps. The combination of cash and food stamps would have moved one-quarter of food stamp households from below to above half the poverty line (Figure 1).

In summer 1993, over half of all food stamp participants were children (Figure 2), most of whom lived in single-parent families. The remaining participants were nonelderly adults

(42 percent) or elderly adults, age 60 or more (7 percent).

I. Characteristics of Food Stamp Households

In summer 1993, the majority of food stamp households contained children (Table 1). Of these households, over two-thirds (67.2 percent) were single-parent homes, over one-quarter (28.4 percent) were multiple-adult homes, and the remaining households contained no members over the age of 17. Households with children received an average monthly food stamp benefit of \$224, reflecting their relatively large average size (3.4 persons). Single-parent homes (3.0 persons on average) received an average of \$212 in food stamps, and multiple-adult homes with children (4.6 persons on average) received an average of \$265.

Households containing elderly persons represented 15.9 percent of all food stamp households. The majority of households containing an elderly person (72.3 percent) were single-person homes, which received an average benefit of \$45, compared with multiple-person households with at least one elderly member, which received an average

benefit of \$120. A substantial proportion of food stamp households contained disabled persons (10.8 percent); these households received an average benefit of \$114.

II. Characteristics of Food Stamp Participants

Among adult participants (age 18 or more), women outnumbered men by about two to one (Table 2). Of the children participating, almost 40 percent were preschool age (0 to 4), and about 60 percent were of school age (5 to 17).

The largest proportion of food stamp participants were white non-Hispanic (42.3 percent), about one-third were African-American non-Hispanic (34.9 percent), and slightly more than one-sixth were Hispanic (16.5 percent). The remaining participants were Asian, Native American, or of another race or ethnicity (Table 3).

III. Income and Benefits of Food Stamp Households

The average monthly food stamp benefit in summer 1993 was \$170. The majority (73.3 percent) of food stamp households received monthly benefits of over \$100--37.5 percent received over \$200 (Table 4). Food stamp households' average monthly gross income was \$501 (Table 5). In summer 1993, 82 percent of all benefits went to households with children and six percent of all benefits went to households with elderly members.

The majority of households (87.3 percent) received assistance payments from one or more of the following sources: Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), General Assistance (GA), Supplemental Security

Income (SSI), Unemployment Compensation, or some other payment such as veterans' benefits or educational loans. About 40 percent of all households received AFDC; over 20 percent received SSI; and nearly one-fifth (18.3) received Social Security payments. Over one-fifth of all households had earned income. A substantial proportion (9.3 percent) had no income.

IV. Characteristics of Food Stamp Households by State

In 1993, slightly over half of all food stamp households were located in eight states: California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas (Table 6). The average monthly food stamp benefit varied by State, reflecting differences in income, household size and composition, and expenses. Food stamp benefits were relatively high (greater than \$190) in Arizona, Delaware, Louisiana, Texas, and West Virginia, States with below average gross household incomes and above average household sizes. Average monthly food stamp benefits were lowest (less than \$140) in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont, States with above-average gross household incomes and below-average household sizes. In Alaska and Hawaii, the only two States where the maximum benefit is set higher because of higher costs of living, the average food stamp benefit was around \$250.

V. Description of and Participation in the Food Stamp Program

The Food Stamp Program is unique among income maintenance programs in two important ways. First, it provides assistance to essentially all financially needy households without imposing nonfinancial categorical

FIGURE 1

POVERTY STATUS OF FOOD STAMP HOUSEHOLDS
WITH AND WITHOUT FOOD STAMPS, SUMMER 1993

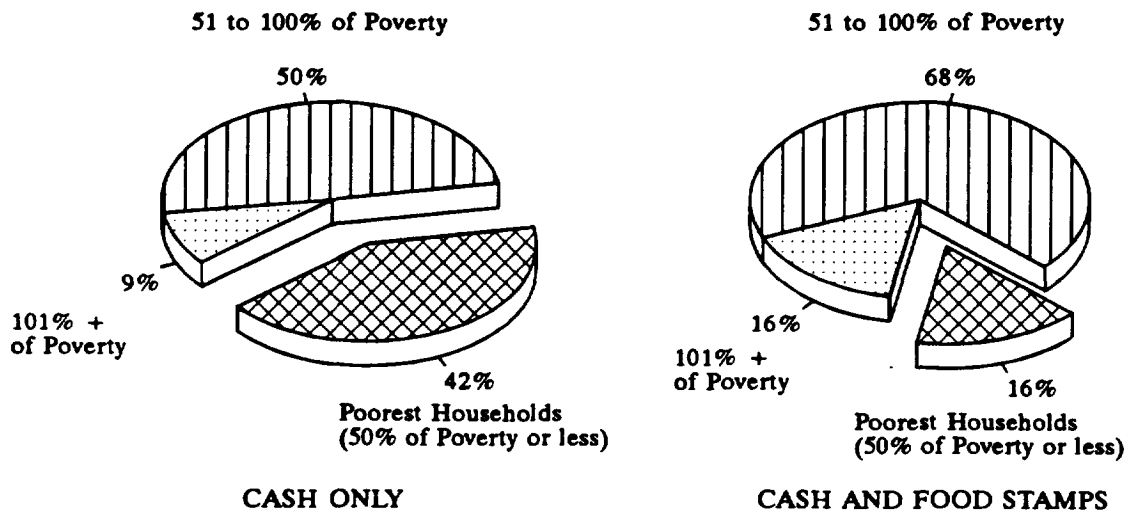
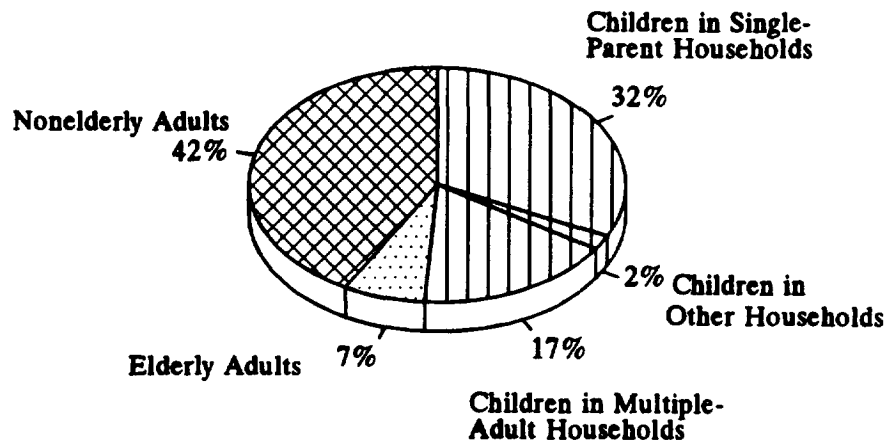


FIGURE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD STAMP PARTICIPANTS, SUMMER 1993



criteria on such things as household composition. Second, it provides benefits in the form of coupons (instead of cash), which can be redeemed for food in any of over 200,000 authorized stores across the nation. The cost of providing food stamps to needy persons is funded fully by the Federal Government. Administrative costs are shared by Federal, State and local governments.

Eligibility. To be eligible for food stamps, a household's assets, gross income, and net income, which is based on gross income less deductions permitted under the Food Stamp Program, must not exceed specified levels that vary by household size, composition, and location. In addition, able-bodied members of the food stamp unit are required to register for work, and some are then required to participate in an employment and training program as a condition of receiving food stamps.

Food Stamp Benefit Computation and Issuance. Benefits are computed by subtracting 30 percent of a household's net income from the maximum benefit amount based on 103 percent of the June cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) for a family of four, adjusted for different household sizes and locations. The TFP is based on the cost of a market basket that provides an economical and nutritious diet. In 1993, the maximum benefit for a family of four in the contiguous United States was \$370 per month. Food stamp participants receive their monthly benefits through the mail, directly from the local office, or through an electronic benefit transfer (which is similar to a bank card).

Change in Participation Over Time. The number of persons participating in the Food Stamp Program has increased significantly since the late 1980s, as has the number of unemployed persons and persons living in

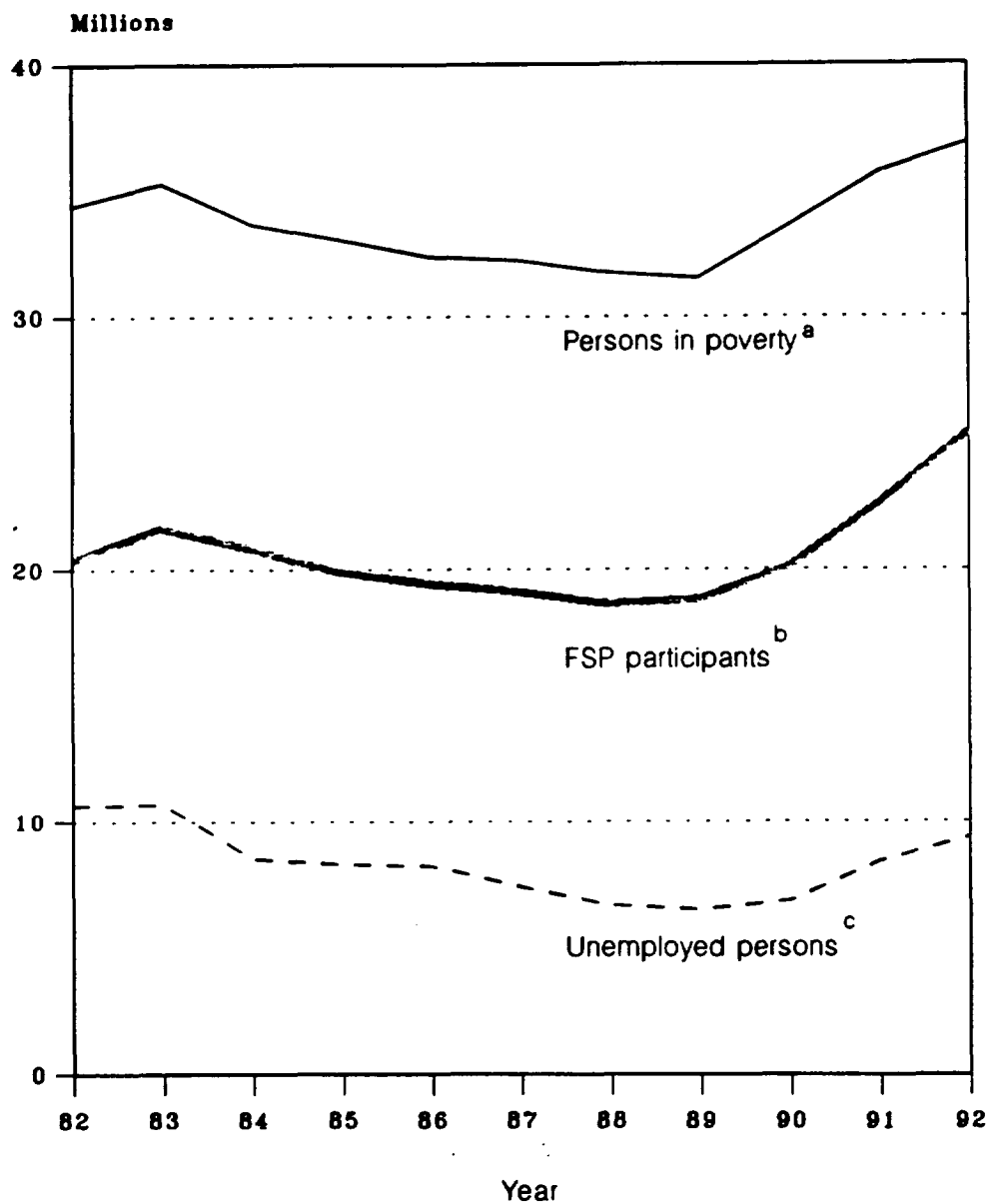
poverty (Figure 3). This increase in participation has been accompanied by changes in the composition of the Food Stamp Program caseload (Table 7). The proportion of households with children has remained fairly constant over time, accounting for at least 60 percent of all households. In contrast, the proportion of households with an elderly member fell from nearly 20 percent in 1989 to 15 percent in 1992 before rising slightly to nearly 16 percent in 1993. The proportion of food stamp households containing a disabled person has grown, reaching 10.8 percent in summer 1993.

VI. Data

The estimates presented here are based on data extracted from the Integrated Quality Control System, which is an ongoing review of food stamp households designed to measure the accuracy with which eligibility and benefit amount determinations are made. All estimates except State-level estimates are based on a summer (July and August) sample of 9,504 households. The State-level estimates are based on a full-year sample of 56,822 households.

Based on Food and Nutrition Service administrative records, the Food Stamp Program served 27.3 million persons in summer 1993. The figure of 28.2 million persons served by the program in summer 1993, as presented in the attached tables, is based on the Food Stamp Quality Control sample and varies from the administrative figure because it is a sample estimate weighted by households rather than persons.

FIGURE 3
FOOD STAMP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS,
UNEMPLOYED PERSONS, AND POOR PERSONS



- ^a Source: Bureau of the Census, Poverty in the United States: 1992, Series P60-185
^b Source: Food and Nutrition Service, Fiscal Year 1992 FSP Participants and Issuance
^c Source: Economic Report of the President, January 1993, Table B-33

Table 1 – Selected Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households, Summer 1993

Household type	Participating households		Average monthly values (dollars)			Average household size (persons)
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Food stamp benefit	Gross income	Net income	
Total	10,910	100.0	170	501	268	2.6
Children	6,775	62.1	224	576	322	3.4
Single-parent families	4,552	41.7	212	498	254	3.0
Multiple-adult families	1,927	17.7	265	796	508	4.6
Other	296	2.7	154	343	169	2.0
Elderly	1,739	15.9	66	536	290	1.4
Living alone	1,258	11.5	45	473	233	1.0
Not living alone	481	4.4	120	699	440	2.6
Disabled	1,183	10.8	114	642	414	2.5
Living alone	510	4.7	50	462	214	1.0
Not living alone	673	6.2	164	779	565	3.6
Other	1,912	17.5	106	229	85	1.2
Single-person	1,615	14.8	95	195	65	1.0
Multiple-person	297	2.7	168	415	192	2.2

Source: Summer 1993 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

Table 2 – Gender and Age of Food Stamp Participants, Summer 1993

Age	All participants		Female		Male	
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	28,183	100.0	16,570	100.0	11,613	100.0
Children (0-17)	14,481	51.4	7,197	43.4	7,284	62.7
1-4	5,581	19.8	2,673	16.1	2,907	25.0
5-17	8,901	31.6	4,524	27.3	4,377	37.7
Adults (18 or more)	13,686	48.6	9,367	56.5	4,319	37.2
18-35	7,497	26.6	5,281	31.9	2,216	19.1
36-59	4,228	15.0	2,698	16.3	1,531	13.2
60 or more	1,962	7.0	1,389	8.4	573	4.9
Unknown	16	0.1	6	0.0	10	0.1

Source: Summer 1993 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

Table 3 – Race/Ethnicity of Food Stamp Participants, Summer 1993

Race	Participants	
	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	28,183	100.0
White, Non-Hispanic	11,908	42.3
African-American, Non-Hispanic	9,839	34.9
Hispanic	4,664	16.5
Asian	728	2.6
Native American	358	1.3
Other	687	2.4

Source: Summer 1993 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

Table 4 – Monthly Food Stamp Benefits of Participating Food Stamp Households, Summer 1993

Monthly food stamp benefit	Participating households	
	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	10,910	100.0
\$0-50	1,658	15.2
\$51-100	1,253	11.5
\$101-150	2,469	22.6
\$151-200	1,438	13.2
\$201-250	1,629	14.9
\$251-300	1,219	11.2
\$301 +	1,245	11.4

Source: Summer 1993 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

Table 5 – Selected Economic Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households, Summer 1993

Income source	Participating households		Persons in households with source		Average income (dollars)		Average food stamp benefit (dollars)	Average household size (persons)
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent	Gross	From source		
Total	10,910	100.0	28,183	100.0	501	(n/a)	170	2.6
Earned income	2,270	20.8	7,750	27.5	801	653	186	3.4
Wages and salaries	2,093	19.2	7,222	25.6	823	674	185	3.5
Self-employment	133	1.2	464	1.6	601	336	231	3.5
Other earned income	70	0.6	174	0.6	568	367	153	2.5
Unearned income	9,529	87.3	25,400	90.1	545	418	169	2.7
Aid to Families with Dependent Children	4,370	40.1	14,595	51.8	509	380	232	3.3
General Assistance	813	7.5	1,138	4.0	339	239	116	1.4
Supplemental Security Income	2,214	20.3	4,391	15.6	591	328	89	2.0
Social Security	1,993	18.3	3,578	12.7	595	442	77	1.8
Unemployment	347	3.2	1,104	3.9	690	504	171	3.2
Other unearned income	2,800	25.7	8,650	30.7	648	124	185	3.1
No income	1,012	9.3	1,601	5.7	0	0	164	1.6

Source: Summer 1993 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.

Table 6 -- Selected Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households by State, Fiscal Year 1993

State	Total (thousands)	Percent of all households	Average monthly amount					Average house- hold size (persons)
			Food stamp benefit (dollars)	Gross income (dollars)	Net income (dollars)	Total deduction (dollars)	Countable assets (dollars)	
Total	10,791	100.0	170	490	258	262	77	2.6
Alabama	216	2.0	174	472	254	255	77	2.6
Alaska	14	0.1	254	858	563	351	101	3.0
Arizona	178	1.7	191	482	252	263	61	2.8
Arkansas	106	1.0	167	532	318	239	140	2.7
California	1,075	10.0	164	583	346	257	49	2.8
Colorado	108	1.0	176	500	239	295	58	2.6
Connecticut	93	0.9	124	612	368	251	79	2.4
Delaware	21	0.2	192	429	196	267	50	2.6
Dist. of Col.	41	0.4	160	381	208	207	14	2.3
Florida	606	5.6	181	477	223	291	96	2.6
Georgia	315	2.9	174	460	251	239	96	2.6
Guam	4	>0	340	514	237	353	127	3.0
Hawaii	44	0.4	252	654	394	275	180	2.3
Idaho	29	0.3	176	549	316	272	170	2.9
Illinois	493	4.6	169	407	211	234	51	2.4
Indiana	184	1.7	179	496	279	249	81	2.7
Iowa	78	0.7	154	528	293	256	99	2.5
Kansas	73	0.7	163	504	266	262	108	2.5
Kentucky	200	1.9	172	457	280	213	75	2.7
Louisiana	282	2.6	193	458	239	255	58	2.8
Maine	61	0.6	153	534	245	320	122	2.3
Maryland	159	1.5	179	384	179	241	17	2.4
Massachusetts	189	1.7	143	556	293	278	71	2.3
Michigan	419	3.9	169	464	226	272	57	2.4
Minnesota	131	1.2	149	564	324	260	141	2.6
Mississippi	200	1.9	172	493	289	238	105	2.7
Missouri	236	2.2	169	476	256	249	112	2.5
Montana	27	0.3	163	522	281	266	154	2.6
Nebraska	45	0.4	149	584	332	272	223	2.6
Nevada	42	0.4	179	455	212	291	42	2.5
New Hampshire	26	0.2	138	545	327	255	164	2.4
New Jersey	218	2.0	173	452	195	280	37	2.4
New Mexico	85	0.8	188	517	305	244	92	3.0
New York	943	8.7	152	535	232	327	38	2.3
North Carolina	253	2.3	163	500	287	238	172	2.6
North Dakota	19	0.2	154	594	334	281	482	2.7
Ohio	535	5.0	160	449	236	243	66	2.4
Oklahoma	146	1.4	165	474	262	250	72	2.5
Oregon	123	1.1	155	481	249	266	109	2.4
Pennsylvania	518	4.8	156	462	226	263	72	2.3
Rhode Island	40	0.4	148	500	270	249	93	2.3
South Carolina	146	1.3	174	514	303	237	121	2.8
South Dakota	20	0.2	185	563	297	295	223	2.9
Tennessee	317	2.9	167	474	254	256	122	2.5
Texas	975	9.0	196	426	224	254	52	2.8
Utah	47	0.4	174	550	320	257	168	2.9
Vermont	25	0.2	121	599	346	276	230	2.3
Virgin Islands	5	>0	307	489	308	198	54	3.4
Virginia	225	2.1	158	470	261	244	122	2.4
Washington	191	1.8	164	495	240	278	64	2.4
West Virginia	124	1.1	239	397	201	218	34	3.2
Wisconsin	125	1.2	145	615	375	254	161	2.7
Wyoming	13	0.1	176	525	292	257	139	2.8

Source: 1993 Food Stamp Quality Control sample.
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Table 7 -- Selected Characteristics of Food Stamp Households Over Time

Year	Total		Children		Elderly		Disabled
	Participants (thousands)	Households (thousands)	Children (percent of all participants)	Households with children (percent of all)	Elderly (percent of all participants)	Households with elderly (percent of all)	Households with disabled (percent of all)
Summer 1993	28,183	10,910	51.4	62.1	7.0	15.9	10.8
Summer 1992	26,091	10,238	51.8	61.6	6.6	15.4	10.1
Summer 1991	24,157	9,204	52.2	61.4	7.1	16.6	9.2
Summer 1990	20,737	7,973	49.4	61.0	7.5	17.5	9.1
Summer 1989	18,652	7,213	49.2	60.1	8.4	19.5	9.2
Summer 1988	18,545	7,015	50.3	60.9	8.1	19.1	8.4
Winter 1988	19,063	7,071	50.9	61.3	8.3	20.3	8.7
Summer 1987	18,748	6,881	51.2	61.2	8.3	20.5	8.4
Summer 1986	19,385	7,101	50.8	61.2	8.4	20.2	7.1
Summer 1985	19,040	7,121	49.5	59.2	8.9	21.4	6.4

Source: Food Stamp Quality Control samples.